LANGUAGE AS CULTURE

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Preface

This paper was delivered as a plenary lecture at the 16th congress of the International Federation of Modern Languages and Literatures (FILLM) held in Budapest in August 1984, on the theme "Change in Language and Literature."

In 1987 I was nominated for the membership of the Executive Council of the International Association of Comparative Literature (AILC) and in 1988 I was elected as the first Arab scholar to that post.

One of the leading members of the Nominations Committee confided to me two years later that the ideas presented in my paper were behind the committee's nomination.

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Mona Abousena

Language as Culture

Language as culture means reducing language to culture. In order to understand this kind of reduction one has to analyse language and culture.

In his invaluable pamphlet, entitled "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", Engels asserts that:

> Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man's horizon at every new advance... On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other. Necessity created the organ.[1]

Engels concludes, thus, that the characteristic difference between the troupe of monkeys and human society is the process of labour, from which and in which language originated. While the lower animals share with man the beginnings of the natural language, they hardly get beyond it. The human easily goes on to higher stages.

Now, how and why does this happen?

The difference between the natural language that does not get beyond modulated sounds produced by animals, and the human artificial language is that in the latter the word is considered to be the sign of idea.

Ideas, by time, became more complex through man's creative, productive potential to master and transform nature, and language had to keep up with this ever-widening and developing knowledge. Tylor observes that:

> ... comparatively few and plain expressions had sufficed for man's early rude condition, but now more and more terms had to be added for the new notions, implements, arts and offices,

> and relations of more highly organized society. Etymology shows how much new words are made by altering and combining old ones, carrying on old words from the old state of things to do duty to the new, stuffing their meanings, and finding in any new thought some resemblance to an old one that would serve to give it a name.[2]

Thus, in the course of the historical development of language, the meaning of words changes and the development of meaning proceeds from elementary to highly complicated forms and, eventually, not only the meaning of a word, but the very character of the reflection of life condensed in the world changes in the course of the development of thinking. In the process of further development the meaning of a word, which appeared later, may lose its connection with the original one and, thus, be infinitely distant from it or entirely new. For example, a pen was originally a feather and when steel pens were invented for the purpose of writing, the original meaning was lost in

current usage. On close analysis it can be seen that the meaning of many words have changed while their phonetic representation has remained the same. In this sense, words are not merely words, counters in some philological game. Words express ideas, and language refers to, expresses and transforms experience. It is, therefore, changing and changeable. It is also the index of the manner in which its speakers organize, through the structural-semantic system of that tongue, their experience of the world in which they live. For example, since the Greeks knew no other language worth studying it was quite normal that they assumed that there was some invariable correlation between the structure of their language and the universal forms of thought. Thus, thought and language form a unity like body and mind, or as Lee Benjamin Whorf observes: "A change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos."[3]

In order to elaborate this relation between language and thought, let us proceed further and ask the following question:

What do we have in mind when we use such words as saying, talking and the like?

The English word "say" is a causative form cognate with 'sees '. So the word "say" can be traced to roots signifying 'light' so that to "say something" seems originally to have meant to 'bring into light'. The Greek *phemi* (say) is connected with *phaino* (bring to light) and so with *phos* or light. The Latin *dicere* (say) is cognate with Greek *deiknumi* and with German *zeigen*, both meaning 'show', while all three words probably go back to an old Indo-European root, *di*, signifying bright or shining. These connections with light are not confined to Indo-European verbs of saying. When we turn to the Semitic language, we are told that the common Hebrew verb *mar* (say) is connected with the idea of 'showing '.

Thus, the fundamental characteristic of saying something is that what is talked about is brought into the light. To put it in another way, what is talked about is made unhidden. But saying shows itself to be a phenomenon that constitutes a triadic relation. The person who says something, the matters about which he says it, and the person or persons to whom he says it. But we

have to take into account even a fourth factor, namely, what is said, i.e. language. It is language which mediates the triadic relation.

This complex relation, thus schematized, may be conveniently called discourse-situation. That is why the logical positivists erred when they tended to treat language as something existing in a vacuum, as an abstraction from the discourse situation. We should reject this kind of abstraction if we consider language functionally, in its concreteness. But the discourse refers to something, to the subject-matter, and the language is again the medium through which such referring is made. Thus, language refers to something beyond itself. In this respect Walter Benjamin makes the interesting remark when he writes about the task of the translator, stating that "languages are not strangers to one another, but a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express ".[4] Benjamin adds that this expression, at the outset, could be called pre-literary and has inevitably exercised some influence on literary creativity, not only with respect to the themes tackled, but also to the treatment of such themes. In this respect one could cite a number of key-words to verify the strict

connection between language and thought in cultural praxis.[5]

The philological approach to language, used in the seventeenth-century European universities, concerns the study of the specific culture of a nation. This approach to a given language treats the latter primarily, almost exclusively, as a tool for getting at the cultural ideas assumed to exist in the literature of that speech community.

This brings us to the relation between language and literature. In his pursuit to control and change nature at the dawn of civilization, man was driven by the necessity to understand, control and appropriate nature by means of two contradictory, yet complimentary, activities of the human mind, namely mythos and logos, each representing two dialectically related universes of discourse. The unifying element in these two contradictory activities is the principle of causality. In the case of mythos, the logic of causality is irrational and non-scientific, and depends rather on intuition and magic to fill in the gaps resulting from man's actual impotence to control nature. Through magic man tried to add power to the hunting weapons by inscriptions,

charms, prayers or invocation of spirits. Logos, on the other hand, is represented by discursive argumentation based on premises and conclusions, where the relation between cause and effect is rational. The history of literature registers this dialectical evolution from mythos to logos.[6]

In this sense, literature corresponds to and reflects the evolution of human civilization. Tragedy began in ritual and myth. In his famous definition of tragedy, Aristotle puts forward six parts that constitute tragedy, stressing that plot is the most important of them, the first principle and soul of tragedy. To borrow Aristotle's own terminology, plot, which In Greek is mythos is the "prime mover" of drama.[7] Evidence is provided by primitive ritual and sympathetic magic, and by the fact that in magical ceremonies the abstract forces of good and evil are represented by personified forces.[8]

Hence, all literature is language in a state of special use, alternating between mythos and logos, or between the super natural and the natural.

Now, as regards European and Arabic literatures, I am going to analyse comparatively what happened to them from the point of view of the alternation between mythos and logos. European literature surpassed the mythos-phase and reached the logos-phase, whereas Arabic literature had not. Our frame of reference is the uprising of hermeneutics, or the science of interpretation, in the West. Its history, from Aristotle to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, has been briefly touched upon by Bultmann whose own method of demythologizing is perhaps the most notable contribution to theological hermeneutics in recent times.[9] Thus, theology could be equivalent to hermeneutics provided that theology is "God-talk".

Anyhow, the goal of the school of interpretation is that a new understanding should be gained. Heidegger mentions that he came across the term "hermeneutics" for the first time when he was studying theology in a Jesuit seminary. [10] At that time he was concerned with the problem of the relation between the words of the holy scriptures and the thoughts (intended meaning) of systematic theology. Then he widened the problem into that of the relation between

language and Being. But Heidegger thinks that the latter problem is linked up with the former and acknowledges that without the stimulus he had received from theology he would not have pursued his philosophical investigations.

I am favourably influenced by Bultmann's conception of hermeneutics as a process of demythologization. In this sense, religious myths are interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically or rather, existentially. Consequently, hermeneutics is not applied to the myth per se, but to man to whom the myth is addressed, and to the world in which man lives that is, to culture. In our hermeneutic approach to culture, language appears to be symbolic. Thus, there is an organic unity between hermeneutics and symbolic language. For nowhere do we find a symbolic language without hermeneutics. The result is that where we do not find hermeneutics, we do not find symbolic language. In this sense, hermeneutics could be conceived of as the secularization of culture by reducing the sacred texts to their secular, i.e. cultural, origins. Such cultural analysis of language leads to the relative separation of language

and culture, or to the secularization of culture by demythologizing language.

Consequently, any comparative study of European and Arabic languages implies, necessarily, the analysis of culture from the perspective of permanence and change. With regard to European languages, they evolved through hermeneutics, which was the result of the religious reformation. Hermeneutics as the interpretation of sacred languages, in Europe, led to a diversity of languages developing from the "mother language", Latin. In Arabic culture, the absence of hermeneutics led to the predominance of traditionalism and to the absolutization of language as expressed in poetry. This is due to the absence of any religious reformation, which supposedly would have been based on a rational and critical examination of Arabic language as culture.

The second part of this study is the application of the analysis carried out in the first part (language in relation to culture in the Arab world) from a comparative perspective that proceeds from the assumption of the unity of civilization, a unity that implies cultural diversity. In order to carry out my analytic examination I have

chosen two mutually illuminating critiques of the Arabic language and poetry, which could be considered as individual, daring attempts at establishing a school of hermeneutics in the Field of Arabic literary studies.

In what follows, I am going to make an attempt at a close comparative analysis of *Permanence and Change* by the Lebanese thinker, poet and critic, Adonis, and *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* by the Egyptian thinker, critic and novelist Taha Hussein.[11] My purpose is to show the direct impact of both studies on the present cultural reality of Arab societies, considering language as part of one and the same cultural totality.

In his brilliant, three-volume study Adonis shows that Arabic language, being the mirror of Arabic culture, is traditionalist and repetitive and marks the predominance of permanence over change through the rejection of creativity, being a cultural and religious taboo, which is an obstacle to a rational, critical interpretation of language and culture. The result of this conservatism has been the preservation of one, fundamental sacred, self-repeating language and a variety of dialects, rather than

languages, as ramification of the archetypal language of the holy Quran. This absolutization of language as culture, and the absence of creativity means the stagnation of culture and the impossibility of a genuine socio-cultural change.

In his unique study of Classical Arabic language and poetry, Taha Hussein, who is also surnamed "Dean of Arabic literature", reveals the secular, pagan roots of Islamic culture through a close textual analysis and interpretation of Pre-Islamic poetry, applying the Cartesian method of rational and critical investigation. The conclusion of his study is that what has been traditionally handed down and recognized as Pre-Islamic poetry is actually a later forgery written in the Islamic period.

In the introductory chapter, entitled 'Method of Study', Hussein writes:

> I intend to introduce in literature the philosophic method propagated by Descartes at the beginning of this modern age, to investigate the truth of things.

> It is well known to everyone that the basic rule of this method requires that the researcher give up all formerly acquired knowledge and embark upon the subject of his research with a free mind. Let us adopt this method when we tackle our Classical Arabic literature and its history. Literature is in need of freedom... It should not be regarded as a religious discipline or a religious means and should be liberated from sacredness... Literature should be like all other sciences, subject to research and criticism, analysis, doubt, rejection and denial. The Arabic language should become subject to the work of researchers as matter is to the experiments of scientists.[12]

Applying this method, Hussein sets off to compare what has been customarily recognized and referred to as "pre-Islamic poetry" (shi'r djahili) and the language of the Quran after Islam. He starts off by asking a fundamental question:

> How could the Arab poets, who came from different Arab tribes, master the meters and rhyme schemes of standard Arabic language, despite the great differences in language and dialects? ... And how can we explain the absence of any clear relation between the different dialects and poetic metre practiced by Arab tribes?[13]

And he answers as follows:

> After Islam, the Arab tribes adopted in their literature another language different from their own, and other rules different from their own rules of poetry and language. That is, Islam imposed upon the Arabs one common language that is the language of the Quran and its dialect, which is the language and dialect of Quraish (the tribe from which Prophet Muhamed came and which became the ruling tribe after Islam).[14]

Then he compares this situation with early Greek poetry by giving the example of native or indigenous Greek and Ionian poetry and language:

> There are clear similar examples in old and modern languages other than the Arabic language. The indigenous poets of Greece had their poetry and rhyme schemes, while the Ionians had their own Ionian poetry and rhyme schemes. When Athens dominated the rest of the Greek islands, Ionian poetry and rhyme as well as Attican prose spread, and the indigenous Greek poets followed in their poetry and prose the rules adopted in Athens and adopted Ionian language after it was polished up by Athenian dialect, i.e, they gave up their own language, dialect and poetry and adopted those of the Athenians. The Arabs did the same thing after Islam: they gave up their literary language and all specifics of their language and

> adopted the language of the Quran and its dialect.[15]

He goes on to give other examples from French and Egyptian poetry to prove his point of view. Later he asks the question: What about Quranic language? And he answers:

> Quranic language dominated before Islam in poetry and prose due to the authority of the tribe of Quraish in trade. This authority continued when Mecca became politically autonomous due to its resistance against foreign influences and policies. Yet, the impact of Quraish did not surpass the boundaries of Higaz (region of Western Arabia on the Red Sea coast). After Islam, the sovereignty and authority of Quraish extended to languages and dialects and with it grew its religious and political power.[16]

He then asks another important, though hypothetical, question:

> Is it not possible that the so-called Pre-Islamic poetry (djahili), which neither represents the Arabs' life nor their mentality, religion or culture under djahilia (i.e. prior to Islam), could have been forged at a later period and attributed to them after Islam?[17]

Hussein finds a simple reply in a historical fact, namely, the habit and common practice of the Arabs during the third and fourth centuries B.C., during the Abbassid period, of using poetry for didactic and educational purposes, such as devising poetry as a confirmatory evidence in elucidating the rather difficult language of the Quran.

Forging poetry for reasons like that is not a unique phenomenon restricted to the Arabs alone, Hussein maintains. He proves that the literary phenomenon of poetic forgery was a common practice in ancient cultures. Poetry was forged and attributed to older poets, and people were deceived and believed in its validity: for example, the epic tales of the Iliad and Odyssey by Homer, or the history attributed to Herodot, which are now considered fairy tales and myths, but

were adopted as reality by their contemporaries. This is because in European culture the mythical literary tradition, which was handed down by the ancient Roman and Greek cultures, was demythologized by modern critics who adopted the scientific method, whereby they combined history, literature, language, and philosophy, and could reduce the respective issues to their secular origins. Hence, they demythologized these formerly sacred myths through their interpretation of language. On the other hand, we can hardly find any difference between the history of the Arabs as written by ancient historians, such as Ibn Ishak and Al-Tabari, and contemporary Arab historians. This is because contemporary Arab historians have not adopted the scientific method and their minds are not purged yet of illusions and myths.[18] This means that the predominant feature in Arabic culture is mythos.

Hussein then goes on to record his observations about pre-Islamic poetry:

> We have observed that Arab ulama (scholars) have used what they called Pre-Islamic poetry as a material whereby

> they could confirm the words of the Quran and hadith (Prophet's sayings) and their grammar and style of speech. This has been exaggeratedly done to the extent that one feels that this poetry was made to measure the Quran and hadith... One has to be extremely naive to believe that the words of the Quran are identical with the Arabs' eloquence.[19]

Hence, Hussein concludes that poetry after Islam was forged and used as a political tool to prove the Arabs' power. For that purpose Arabic language specialists wanted to study the Quran linguistically and to find evidence of the validity of its words and meanings, and to prove that the Quran is Arabic and identical with the Arabs' language. Therefore, they quoted some poetic verses to prove that certain words in the Quran are purely and undoubtedly Arabic. However, Hussein concludes the opposite from his hermeneutical study of Classical Arabic poetry and language. He writes as follows:

> I believe that if there is an Arabic text which is undoubtedly Arabic and is, therefore, the most trustworthy and reliable source of Arabic language, it is the Quran. The Quranic verses and words should be used to judge the authenticity of what is called Pre-Islamic poetry and not vice versa.[20]

This conclusion is highly significant, for two reasons: first, it means that any interpretation of the Quran is verbal; secondly, it reveals a shocking truth, namely, that the language of the Quran is not divine but human. In other words, instead of claiming that pre-Islamic poetry is the imitation of the language of the Quran, which is divine and sacred, Hussein maintains that the language of the Quran is the imitation of poetry which is a man-made language. This inversion of the divinity and sacredness of language is the first and probably last attempt in Arabic culture to demythologize language and culture by reducing them to their secular origins and uncovering their socio-political dimensions, that is, showing that tribal, political and

religious animosities led to the forgery of what has been known as pre-Islamic poetry. However, this early attempt was soon aborted by the religious authorities, and the author was made to write another version, which was published the following year (1926) under the new title On Pre-Islamic Literature, with modifications and an additional chapter on prose literature. In the new version he omitted the parts that cast doubt on the creation of the Quran and revelation, as well as on some religious legends, which implicitly deny their sacredness.

In my own opinion, although Hussein adamantly advocated the application of the rational, scientific method in interpreting Arabic culture, his conception of modern Arabic culture was not completely correct. In his first book he predicted that the Arab mind would become Cartesian:

> If there is in Egypt today a group of people who support the old and others who are in favour of the new, this is because some of these people have been influenced by the European style whereas others have only

> assimilated a small portion of that influence or none at all. The increasing dissemination of Western science in Egypt and the tendency of individual and social efforts towards spreading Western science will eventually make our minds become European, which will make us study the Arabic literature and history in the light of Cartesian method as the West did with the Greek and Roman literatures. The future is for Descartes' method, and not for the method of the ancients.[21]

However, actual history proved the opposite. Even today Hussein's book is regarded by the majority of Arab intellectuals as a taboo. The printing of the second version is sufficient evidence and a clear indication of the failure of the author's view of the future. Besides, the present, ever-widening and widely spreading phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism, in every area of social life in the Arab world, provides a clear historical evidence for the predominance of mythos over logos in present-day Arabic culture.

The historical distance between Taha Hussein's *On PreIslamic Poetry* (1926) and Adonis's *Permanence and Change* (1974) provides a unique opportunity of indirect criticism. In other words, the later work is an indirect critique of the earlier one in that it reveals its shortcomings and provides a scientific explanation of the earlier, abortive attempt made by Hussein to apply a scientific, rational method in understanding and interpreting Arabic culture and language. While Hussein, in his application of the Cartesian method, has reached the conclusion that the future of the Arab mind is to become Cartesian in the sense of adopting a rational, scientific method of thinking, i.e. logos, Adonis gives a negative response to Hussein's view of the future almost fifty years later. He asserts the predominance of mythos over logos, as represented by the prevailing traditionalist trend within Arabic language and thought. By that he means the irrational, unscientific way of thinking, which he considers responsible for the present situation in Arabic culture, which is characterized by a crisis in creativity.

Adonis explains, in an illuminating passage, the reasons for the belief in the

precedence of Islam over djahilia (paganism) in the view of Arab traditionalists. He claims that this belief proceeds directly from the nature of the dogma itself and not, as Hussein mistakenly thinks, naivety, which is the only explanation he could find for the absolute acceptance of the validity of pre-Islamic poetry. According to Adonis:

> Islam came as institutionalization of a new world view and a new system. However, the origin of Arabic culture is twofold: pagan (pre-Islamic or djahili), and Islamic. Since Islam is the end or culmination of the Arabic (i.e. human) view of the world and the cosmos, therefore, the beginning has been interpreted within the context of Islam. In this way, the end was turned into the beginning. For what is the end, or the ultimate, must also be the beginning, or the emanation, since it negates all that preceded it, that is, all that contradicts it and establishes the origins. In this sense, djahilia precedes Islam only formally

> (i.e. historically), while Islam precedes it essentially. Therefore, Islam is the origin and frame of reference, according to which anything and everything is identified and interpreted because from it everything emanates.[22]

Thus Adonis concludes that Arabic culture, in its totality, is religious and dogmatic and, therefore, rejects creativity and innovation. He also relates the dogmatic character of Arabic language to the problem of the creation of the Quran. The problem of the creation of the Quran, Adonis contends, transformed language from the natural level to that of revelation. Pre-Islamic language is natural language, whereas the language of the Quran is not. Therefore, Arabic language, beginning with the Quran, has been separated from natural language and has been connected with divine revelation. Thus, it broke away from human reason. Hence, there emerged a contradiction between language and nature. While nature is ever- changing and renewable, "revelation-language" is whole, complete and permanent, to which human reason is committed. . Nature represents possibility,

change and relativity, while "revelation-language" is necessity, permanence and absoluteness. The return to authenticity is a return to "revelation language", that is, to permanence. [23]

This gives rise to the problem of time in Islamic culture or, as Adonis calls it, "prophetic time,' which is characterized by permanence and stability. Unlike Greek time (*cronos*), which creates and annihilates everything it creates, revelatory time (prophetic time) lies outside such motion of birth and death, or the motion of change and becoming. Revelatory time is eternal. Therefore, it turns the future into past. Hence, "prophetic time" creates the optical illusion which makes the past appear as the future, and the future as the past. It restores man into the past and places the past into the future. Hence, the future becomes a form of the past. Man, therefore, moves and thinks within a past time that is a priori to his personal experience. The present. or real time, is just a fleeting occasion for reminding man of eternity. Hence, time negates man's life and subjectivity. This is expressed by Al-Ghazali's words: "Life is a farm for the next world."[24]

Such attitude conceives of time not as a continuum, but as disconnected and discontinuous moments, or as fragments of minutes. Place also becomes a combination of disconnected points. Like time, place is a means of reminding man that life on earth is transient and a fragile bridge leading to heaven, where absolutely divine existence is encountered. The concept of causality is negated, as God alone is active, and man is only the object of His acts. In other words, man is an acquirer or an 'acquisitive being' (*kasiban*) who has no will of his own, but derives it from God's will. Man does not participate in discovering the unknown, but receives or acquires it by the will and act of God.[25]

In this sense, Arab traditionalist society seeks and finds its roots in revelation, and is inevitably tied up with the permanent and everlasting, i.e. God, rather than with the changing and transient, i.e. man. For change means incompleteness and, therefore, lies outside historical motion. Therefore, creativity, re-evaluation and innovation are deviations from the origins.

Hence, change has acquired a negative connotation, that is, deviation from

permanence. Cultural values, and the whole of Arabic culture, do not change in such a way so as to make the present different from the past. Change is accepted only insofar as it does not deviate from the origins. It has to correspond to the past, to imitate an a priori model. Change, in this sense, is a form of openness and growth of permanence; it is imitation and continuation and not innovation. Rejection of change implies degradation of innovation. The new opposes the old (the origins) and is, therefore, false and transient. Consequently, culture is necessarily repetitive, that is, repetition of memory and customs. Memory is the basis of time, and customs are concretization of memory. Memory represents the absolute, or heaven, and customs represent the relative, or earth. The subordination of customs to memory is a symbol of the subordination of earth to heaven. If customs are a transient present, memory is a past entity, that what the present turns into past.

In this sense, memory is the opposite of creativity and innovation. This is confirmed by the cultural significance of the etymology of the word "invention" (*bid'a*). Adonis remarks:

Change has never been admitted into the Arab social structure to develop and transform society. On the contrary, change was regarded by the prevailing sectors as a kind of dissent and was given the derogatory name 'invention' (bid'a) to denote heresy. Moreover, inventors were called heretics, and the prominent ones among them were fought against either by being discredited and cursed, or by imprisonment and assassination.Finally, any creative trend was suppressed. [26]

The rejection of invention is centered around the dogma as the major imperative for the preservation of the origins. This is expressed by the Caliph Omar Ibn El-Khattab, who defined the origins as: "Everything must be measured according to its proximity to God and its similarity to Truth."[27] This statement is further elaborated

by the leader of traditionalists, Imam El-Shafi'i: "Only the Book (Quran) and Sunna (the Prophet's sayings and acts) are the Truth, and anything else is hallucination."[28] This is again confirmed by Ibn-Taimia, a leading traditionalist thinker and the theoretician of the present Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Arab world: "Anything that opposes the Book (Quran) and Sunna is absolute falsehood."[29] He also propagated the famous saying: "Logic is heresy."

The rejection of creativity derives directly from the traditionalist notion of acquisition (*al-Kasb*). Al-Ghazali writes: "People's (God's slaves') acts are added to God's acts who initiated them by creation, and which man received by acquisition (Kasb) to be rewarded for his obedience (i.e. carrying out Allah's imperatives) and punished for his disobedience. Man's (slave's) ability exists only while performing the aet, not before, during which Allah bestows upon him the ability called 'acquisition'. Hence, man does not act, and, therefore, it would not be correct

to say that man creates, since the acts of creation belong only to God, who created men and their acts."[30]

With respect to acts, the concept of acquisition (*Kasb*) on the literary level corresponds to the concept of creativity, in the sense of imitation (*taqlid*), or copying tradition. It is acquisition that has already been accomplished. Therefore, the idea that the poet's role is restricted to linguistic formulation goes back to the restriction of creativity to God alone. Since erection is God's absolute, divine ability, the poet's role is restricted to formal structure because God created language.

The idea of traditionalist jurisprudence (*fiqh*), according to which man is unable to"create his own acts, has an equivalent in the literary traditionalist trend (concerning language and poetry). Poetry is also the acquisition of what has been originally founded, and the poet is unable to write or surpass the origins.

The absolute call for blind imitation of sacred origins means an equally absolute and dogmatic rejection of interpretation. Hence, traditionalism or salafia is inevitably against

interpretation, as the latter means doubt, and skeptical talk about God's qualities is inadmissible. A man who interprets a Quranic version in a way that contradicts God's intention commits an unpardonable sin, as such an attitude reveals the position of the Prophet's opponents.[31]

This dogmatic attitude appears most clearly in relation to poetry and language. Adonis tells us that traditionalists maintain that Arabic poetry is a unique, unmatchable phenomenon in history. They also think that what is said about the poetry of other peoples does not apply to Arabic poetry. Therefore, it is restricted only to the Arabs. It is also believed that Arabic language is superior to all other languages. Others claim that Arabic language is like Allah, whom no human can fully understand because, as Ibn Faris, one of the traditionalists, said: "Only a prophet can understand the language of the Arabs."[32]

In poetry, the poet reproduces what is imprinted on the nation's mind and taste.[33] In other words, poetry is the reproduction of the collective memory or collective unconscious, and the more authentic the poet's reproduction, the more poetic it is. The nation's mind and taste are ethical

factors; therefore, praise (i.e. good morals) and invective (bad morals) are the predominant themes in Arabic poetry.[34]

Consequently, poetry - in principle - means following the model of the ancients. In practice, it is connected with values inherited from the ancients who constitute the authority. Such an authority is the symbol of safeguarding and preserving these values. On the level of expression, poetry is the unification of the name and the named. Hence, poetry, like religion, becomes identical with truth.[35]

Further on, Adonis tells us that the meaning of "poet" in the Quran is equivalent to the insane, the magician, the priest, and Satan. This correlation, Adonis explains, implies that poetry does not speak about the truth. It is the work of the devil, who turns falsehood into truth and vice into virtue. This means, however, that the magical impact of poetry is latent and can only be revealed by God's will. Therefore, the Quran is not poetry, and after Islam poetry was related to religious values and became a tool in the service of religion. This new function of poetry after Islam is mentioned in the Quran and in the Prophet's sayings.[36]

Here a major question arises:

If interpretation is rejected, what are the possibilities of introducing hermeneutics into Arabic language and literature?

Adonis, in his descriptive approach, gives an indirect answer. He refers to the etymology of religion: "Religion is language: it is custom, behaviour, judgment, government, obedience, reward, politics, opinion."[37] This total identification of religion with language means that religion is eternal revelation. This literary attitude originates from a religious attitude established by the traditionalist trend.

Adonis states that hermeneutics, or the interpretation of sacred texts, is almost impossible in Arabic culture. For religion is eternal revelation, whereas thought or philosophy is a human artifice; if we proclaim the subjugation of revelation to the logic of thought or philosophy, it means that we accept that revelation is liable to change. This, in turn, could lead to the elimination of revelation. Moreover, revelation is the last word, while in philosophy there is no last word. Furthermore, subjecting

revelation to philosophy means equating God's words with those of man.[38]

This explains the difference between Christian theology and what is known as the "science of kalam" in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Kalam deals with the divine traits of the word (parole), by means of discussions concerning God and the things related to God. (It is also mentioned as the "science of *tawhid*" [divine unicity], and also known as the "science of discourse"; it might as well be called "Islamic theology".) In Christianity, theology emerged as a science in the context of philosophy, i.e. rational, logical interpretation of religious dogmas with the purpose of investigating man's knowledge of the attributes of God. Whereas Christian theology is basically illuminatory, besides being apologetic, the unique function of kalam is the apologetic, uncritical defense of Islamic dogma. Due to the predominantly verbal nature of Islamic culture, the 'science of kalam" emerged and developed within the strict bounds of verbal interpretation. Therefore, any linguistic interpretation of religious texts can only be confined to the verbal level (as opposed to that of philosophy), i.e. to the domain of words rather than that of ideas.

Adonis concludes that the complete identification of religion, language and poetry, being a predominant feature in traditionalist Arabic thought and culture, led to the following results:

1) Separation of language from meaning, i.e. separation of form and content. Hence, the forms of expression in poetic tradition are complete and should be imitated, being the origins.
2) Poetry is not creation; it is craftsmanship. The poet does not invent new forms but recalls or reproduces the original forms in their original language.
3) Poetic tradition, like the tradition of revelation, is old. In it perfection has been obtained once and for all. This means that in poetry perfection lies neither in the present nor in the future but in the past, which means absolute negation of the possibility of creativity or even innovation. Hence, it is no longer a problem of the old versus the new, but the question of the permanent origins which are everlastingly new and more perfect than any novel attempt.
4) The jurist (*fiqhi*) has become the symbol of Arabic culture, and Arabic thought has

become juristic. Any juristic thought, by nature, is necessarily traditionary (*naqli*). Such a juristic view has been applied to poetry. As language has sacred, ultimate origins which have been realized in the ideal model of the Quran, in the Prophet's life and in that of the Caliphs, poetry also has ultimate origins, which are almost sacred and are realized in their ideal form in *djahilia* and at the beginning of Islam.

5) Arabic thought became normative, which measures the present and the future by the standards of the past, irrespective of experience and evolution, to the extent that the present and the future are considered symbols of decadence and backwardness.[39]

This gave rise to a major feature of the Arab personality, which manifests itself on the level of linguistic expression, namely, separation of meaning from speech. This is expressed by the belief that meaning is prior to speech, speech being only a form or a decorated image of meaning. Adonis maintains that this feature manifests itself in the Arab's preference for oral, verbal rhetoric and polemics because they are nearest to the imitation of divine utterance or revelation.

Written language is simply utterance temporalized; it is the faint shadow of utterance. Although the function of poetry changed after Islam, its form did not change. This is again confirmed by the separation of speech from meaning, or content from form, which makes poetic expression a kind of identification between old speech and meaning, or the a priori. This meaning is the truth, that is, Islam and its values. This explains why the Arabs look upon pre-Islamic poetry and language from a religious perspective. That is because the miracle of the Quran depends on pre-Islamic miracle. When the Quran challenged pre-Islamic poetry it did so in the sense of being perfect, the ideal of rhetoric. Hence, it acquired a religious dimension and made the Arab's consciousness of his past and culture a religious one, to which he has to adapt. Since the expression of truth is clear, and truth is logical and rational, therefore imagination should be avoided because it is a state between sensations and reason, which does not lead to definite knowledge, but rather to doubt.[40]

Finally Adonis finds the antidote for the predominance of permanence in Arabic culture in liberation from *salafia*

(traditionalism) and in abolition of the sacredness of the past which should be studied as a part of human experience and human knowledge. Besides, man should be considered as a creative being, not just a preserver or memory of tradition:[41] a conclusion very similar to the one reached by Taha Hussein.

As has already been demonstrated in the aforegoing, the development of language can happen only through the complete control of language - so long as the origin of language coincides with the origin of civilization. The control of language comes out of man's ability to control the outside world, the natural and the social. The more man is unable to control the outside world, the weaker becomes his ability to control language. This means that control of language necessitates that language should be regarded as man-made, i.e. natural and not divine - secular and not sacred.

Now the question is:
What kind of remedy does Adonis propose to achieve such a control over language?

Adonis's descriptive, phenomenological method and his diagnostic approach to the problem of permanence and change show that Arabic culture and language have been isolated from their cultural roots, and instead of representing evolution they fell into a kind of involution by becoming stagnant and stopping at the level of one specific stage of progress, namely, that of Arab bedouinism and tribalism. In this way, Arabic culture has been separated from labour and experience which are the result of direct contact with nature. The concept of acquisition (Kasb) in Arabic culture conceives of labour not as production in the sense of transformation of nature, but stops at the level of consumption of nature as a divine endowment. The distinction between production and consumption clarifies the Arabs' position vis a vis technology, or the *use* (i.e. consumption) of technology, as distinct from the making or production of technology. The Arab accepts modern Western civilizational products, but rejects the rational principles that invented these achievements. Real modernity, however, lies in the act of creativity and not in the products in themselves.[42] The Arab, thus, rejects real modernity, which is equivalent to rejecting doubt, experimentation, and unconditioned

freedom of research, and the adventurous spirit of discovering the unknown and accepting it.[43]

It is observed rightly that the Arabs are not engaged in technological production, which means that the making of machines, as distinct from their use, remains alien. This concept of the annihilation of the process of making is the outcome of the negation of change and innovation on the pretence of preserving the authentic identity which lies in the past. The result is maintaining the consumer-producer relation between the Arabs and the West. Moreover, the acceptance of Western technology and the rejection of the cultural values attached to that technology, point to the Arabs' concept of modern culture. This attitude reduces culture to technology, which means de-ideologization of technology and emptying technology from its cultural content. Hence, the West provides Arab societies with technological gadgets after removing the cultural values inherent in them.[44] In this way, any possibility of a genuine cultural, creative assimilation is prevented, and the consumer-producer relation between the Arabs and the West is preserved in an ever-growing state of tension. This tension,

leading to all kinds of crises, makes the Arab-West relation one of confrontation, despite the apparent harmony. For, while the Arabs accept economic dependence on the West, they reject the idea of establishing a genuine cultural dialogue with it.

When advocating liberation from traditionalism, Adonis falls into a number of contradictions: the first one has to do with what he calls the destruction of tradition, or the elimination of old, traditionalist structures. Adonis insists that this destruction should not and cannot be attempted with a tool outside Arabic tradition; it must be done with a tool from within Arabic culture. Such a destruction should not relate to a past other than that of the Arabs, or to any tradition other than Arabic tradition. However he adds, the attitude toward tradition should be determined in terms of change, and the factors of tradition should become parts of the future.[45]

The contradiction here is twofold: first, Adonis equates change and destruction. In this sense, he stops at the level of negation and does not surpass it to the negation of negation. He rejects the traditionalist

ideology of permanence, but is unable and unwilling to surpass it to a new, futuristic alternative ideology of change. In other words, he stops at the level of destruction, or "de-ism , and does not surpass it to that of reconstruction, or "re-ism". [46] Secondly, by insisting on authenticity alone as a major factor in the development of Arabic culture and language, Adonis negates the concept of dialectic which he himself advocates.

The second contradiction is that Adonis's idea about the destruction of tradition turns the essentially dialectical relation between tradition and authenticity into a formal one. Such a non-dialectical thought appears in his assumption of the irreconcilability of opposition between the development of Arabic language and culture from within, i.e. by means of authenticity, and from the outside, i.e. by tools of the modern age or, more strictly speaking, modernity.

The relation between authenticity and modernity is characterized by a contradiction of unity and opposition, as authenticity, by time, is turned into tradition. Therefore, to assume that the opposition between them is irreconcilable, is to cancel dialectic.

This raises the problem of authenticity and modernization, which has been troubling Arab intellectuals for almost a century. The first contact with the West produced an acute cultural crisis based on a contradiction between a desired communication with the West and an actual separation. This insoluble contradiction, which goes back o the eighteenth century, produced the famous dichotomy known in the circles of Arab intellectuals as the problem of authenticity and modernization. This relation between the two concepts is problematic, for it implies an inherent contradiction arising from the wish to become modern without losing one's identity. In this sense, identity is seen in a past rather than a future context. Authenticity, on the other hand, is a term often used in developing countries, referring to their national identity. As a reaction to imperialism, national liberation movements identify their policy of de-colonization with that of de-westernization that has separated these countries from their traditional cultural roots. This dichotomy between East and West isolates Arabic culture from human civilization and cuts it off from its universal roots.

In one of his articles, Adonis says that the Arab poet could create what contradicts, in content and form, a the poetry of his ancestors, and still remain Arabic.[47] That is, he could be influenced by poets from a different culture (for example, Europe) and still continue to preserve his own culture, which is expressed in his own language (Arabic). This proves that Adonis regards language as a mere receptacle and not an integrated style of thought and life. For, as long as Arabic language, as Adonis himself admits, is predominantly permanent and stagnant, it is highly difficult and improbable for such a culture to assimilate the poetry produced by another culture characterized by change and dynamism. Any attempt to develop the language through tradition (i.e. permanence) will be doomed to failure because such a culture does not possess the tools of its own development. Finally, by insisting on authenticity, Adonis insists on preserving mythos.

One might ask: How can we account for the contradictions in Adonis's arguments?

In my opinion, these contradictions can be approached by the method Adonis employs, namely by the phenomenological method. This method depends on the description of phenomena after isolating them from the field within which they emerged. This method also rejects dialectical contradictions and acknowledges only formal logic based on the principle of non-contradiction. Therefore, Adonis falls into illegitimate contradictions, such as the contradiction between developing language from within and from outside Arabic tradition, and the contradiction between Arabic and European poetry.

This method is also responsible for Adonis's negation of any futuristic view. He writes: "My study is a plan to describe Arabic culture as it is in its permanence and change, with the purpose of understanding it in order to change it as it should be. However, it is not my intention to put forward a method of change or to propagate a futuristic view of Arabic culture and literature because change grows empirically out of a changing society.[48] Adonis's insistence on experience and practice as the only criteria to realize change reveals a non-dialectical view, as it separates practice from theory - whereas

thought is influenced by practice and vice versa. Moreover, such a view contradicts his own diagnosis of Arabic society as being predominantly permanent, i.e. against change.

On the other hand, there is yet another, probably more essential reason for Adonis's advocacy of tradition and authenticity and his abstinence from venturing any futuristic view of change. I mean his Arabic cultural and mental structures (bias), or his unequivocal, ethnic belonging to Arabic tradition. In his more recent articles and interviews Adonis apologetically declares his return to his absolutely Arab roots and his belonging to Arabic culture. [49] He, thus, negates any possibility of a cultural dialogue between Arabic and Western cultures based on the principle of a mutually creative, critical assimilation. By glorifying Arabic culture and literature, in isolation from world literature and culture, he absolutizes Arabic culture. By doing so he absolutizes mythos and denies logos.

This is again confirmed by Adonis in another article which reads as follows: "The poet, when composing a poem, proceeds

from a state of enchantment which is illogical, irrational and unintellectual."[50] However, in the same article Adonis advises the revolutionary vanguard to criticize mythical consciousness which is an obstacle hindering the development of revolutionary consciousness because it "helps in the reinforcement and continuation of past culture".[51] This almost schizoid contradiction between the first and second statement reveals the personal conflict within Adonis the poet, on the one hand, and the critic and political thinker, on the other.

Anyhow, despite the foregoing critique, one cannot deny the intellectual courage with which Adonis conducts his critical investigation to unravel the roots of backwardness and stagnation in Arabic culture by applying a scientific method, irrespective of the shortcomings of that method or the conclusions he reaches, besides his own regressive attitude.

This attempt, in its own right, is a highly important one and is highly required for the spreading of the critical tendency within Arabic traditionalist culture in order to promote its development into trends and

movements instead of being limited to individuals. Such critical studies help in shedding light on the nature of Arabic culture and in the long run could produce an Arab movement of enlightenment that carries out hermeneutical studies within the fields of religion, language and literature. Such a movement, particularly within the field of literary criticism, could lead to the development of Arabic culture through literature.

Finally, a crucial question remains: Is there any possibility of such a movement occuring in the future? In answer- and to confirm my point of view put forward in the foregoing pages - I would like to quote some of the recommendations of the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in 1977:

> The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large. In order to achieve the ultimate aims and objectives of education, knowledge must be classified

into the following two categories:

a) Given "perennial knowledge" or the Divine revelation presented in the Quran and Sunna and all that can be derived from them with emphasis on the Arabic language as the key to the understanding of both. b) "Acquired knowledge" including social, natural and applied science susceptible to quantitative growth and multiplication, limited variations and cross-cultural borrowings as long as consistency with the Shari'ah as the source of values is maintained. There must be a core knowledge drawn from both with major emphasis on the first, specially on the Shari'ah which must be made obligatory to all Muslims at all levels of the educational system from the highest to the lowest, graduated to conform to the standards of each level. This, along with the compulsory

teaching of Arabic should form the major section of the core curriculum. These two alone can sustain Islamic civilisation and preserve the identity of the Muslims. [52]

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5. This is particularly demonstrated by the patriarchal nature of language which is influenced by man's most basic ideas about human nature and about man's relation to the universe and his role ln society. For example, the words "spinster" and "bachelor" both refer to the state of being unmarried. However, "spinster" being applied only to women evokes the idea of being rejected and unwanted, while the word "bachelor" marks physical and social attraction. Dale Spender, Men Made Language, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1983.
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12. T. Hussein, pp. 11-12
13. Ibic, p. 16
14. Ibid, p. 35
15. Ibid, p. 36
16. Ibid p. 37
17. Ibid., p. 46.
18. This feature is confirmed by recent articles written by the famous thinker and critic Louis Awad and published in the weekly Egyptian magazine AlMossawar under the title 'History and Myth' in which he confirms the predominance of mythos in Arabic culture as manifested in the interpretation of history.
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20. Ibid., p. 77.

21. Ibid., p. 45.
22 Adonis, pp. 35-36.
23. Ibid., p. 37.
24. Ibid., p. 39.
25. Ibid., p. 38.
26. Ibid., pp. 26-2i.
27. Ibid., p. 41.
28. Ibid.
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